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USDA eGovernment Program Selected as Excellence.gov Awards Finalist

On February 5, 2004, USDA's eGovernment Program was recognized as a finalist during the Excellence.gov Awards Program. Sponsored by the Industry Advisory Council, the Federal CIO Council, and the American Council for Technology, Excellence.gov honors best practices in Federal eGovernment programs. USDA's eGovernment Program was included in the top 25 out of over 90 applications for demonstrating excellence in eGovernment innovation.

A panel of representatives from industry and government selected the awards, considering criteria such as:

- Maturity of measurable results
- Presentation of measurable results
- Degree of innovation used to bring about success
- Overall impact on the agency's ability to fulfill its mission
- Ability to replicate and/or transport the governance model to other organizations.

USDA's eGovernment Program was recognized for its focus on creating common services and shared functions for USDA and coordinating those efforts across other Federal agencies—improving services, eliminating redundancy and reducing costs. The selection panel reviewed the program's governance structure, communications plan and integration with the Department's Capital Planning and Investment Control (CPIC) process as well as six of USDA's high-priority initiatives that are expected to provide significant benefits to USDA employees, customers, and business partners: eAuthentication, eLearning, eDeployment, eGrants, eLoans, and Web-based Supply Chain Management. Look for updates on these initiatives in this and future eGov@USDA Newsletters.

USDA Associate CIOs Greg Parham and Chris Niedermayer attended the awards banquet and received the Finalist Award on behalf of USDA.

For more information on the Excellence.gov awards, please contact the eGovernment Team.

GSA Recognizes USDA's eAuthentication Service

On December 22, 2003, USDA became the first Federal department to qualify as a Level 2 credential provider, passing the General Service Administration's (GSA's) Credential Assessment Process.

A Level 2 qualification means that USDA's eAuthentication service meets or exceeds the government-wide security standards for protecting web services.

GSA approved USDA's process for the distribution of usernames and passwords for official applications. Consequently, these usernames and passwords will be valid for any Federal applications that accept Level 2 credentials. USDA launched its expanded eAuthentication service in October 2003 and was one of the first Departments to implement an enterprise-wide authentication tool for usernames and passwords.

In their review, the GSA Assessment Team was impressed with USDA's eAuthentication service in general, and specifically noted the:

- Support organization surrounding the service;
- Robust username and password registration service;
- Local Registration Authority processes, training, and manuals; and
- Well-developed and stringently tested Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP) and disaster recovery plans.

In addition to being awarded a Level 2 standing, USDA continues to actively participate in the GSA-led eAuthentication Presidential Initiative. USDA is a member of a GSA pilot program, designed to develop a system where USDA credentials can be used at other Federal Web sites.

For more information on USDA's Level 2 qualification, please contact the eGovernment Team.

Karen Evans Visits USDA

Karen Evans, OMB Administrator for E-Government and Information Technology, and her senior advisors met with the Chief Information Officer and his deputy and associates to discuss USDA's enterprise architecture and eGovernment efforts. She also provided an update on those two efforts at the Federal level. Following the USDA presentations, Ms. Evans expressed how pleased she was with the department's progress and activities. She indicated that much of what we were doing could be "best practices" that could be shared with other Federal departments.

USDA's eAuthentication Service Records Increased Usage

USDA's eAuthentication service reported increased use in January 2004, as more users apply for credentials and the integration of agency applications continues. In January alone, the eAuthentication service recorded 480,000 logons and 3.5 million hits on protected Web pages.

The USDA eAuthentication Team has worked to enhance user experience from the service's launch in October 2003. To increase eAuthentication's operability, 7,800 Local Registration Authorities (LRAs) and Help Desk personnel have been trained and registered. These trained Help Desk employees received an average of 100 calls per day in January — most calls inquiring about forgotten passwords.

By mid-February 2004, USDA's eAuthentication service had 61,000 users: approximately 50,000 USDA employees and the rest USDA customers. An average of 76 new users register every day.

The eAuthentication service helps fulfill the eGovernment Initiative in the President's Management Agenda and assists USDA Agencies in meeting the Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA) requirement for providing electronic options for customers doing business with the Government. This new service is available government-wide to all Federal Agencies.

For more information on USDA's eAuthentication service, please contact the eGovernment Team.

Rural Internet Usage Rises

A new study, *Rural Areas and the Internet* by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, reports that rural Internet usage is on the rise. Between 2000 and 2003, the number of rural users connected to the Internet rose by eleven percent to a new high of fifty-two percent of rural residents. The study also states that the use of broadband technology is increasing in rural areas.

The report details, however, that the number of rural users connected to the Internet still lags behind suburban and urban populations by ten percent. The project notes that this difference in the number of connected users among the three populations remained constant over the three years and is likely due to several factors, such as lower income, lack of vendor choices available, and a generally older population in rural areas. The report also notes that rural users are less likely to make online transactions compared to urban and suburban users.

Additional findings of Pew's survey show that rural residents who are experienced in Internet usage like computers and technology more than their suburban and urban counterparts. For Internet users with three or more years of experience, eighty-four percent of rural users say that they have positive feelings toward computers and tech-

nology compared to seventy-six percent of their suburban and seventy-five percent of their urban counterparts.

The survey also found that rural users utilize certain Internet services more often than suburban and urban users: searches for health and spiritual information and instant messages.

For more information on the survey, please visit www.pewinternet.org.

USDA's eTravel Migration Team Moves Forward

eTravel is one of the 21 Presidential Initiatives in which USDA actively participates. This effort is expected to streamline the internal efficiency of the Federal government by streamlining government travel through a highly automated, unified Web-based environment that will track every step of the travel process.

USDA's eTravel Migration Team held a kick-off meeting in early December to outline the next steps associated with this government-wide initiative, and on December 31, 2003, the Team completed and submitted a USDA migration plan and schedule to the General Services Administration (GSA).

The USDA Migration Team, with each of the USDA mission areas and a cross-section of the USDA agencies represented, is currently analyzing the different travel systems employed by USDA agencies. The Team will use this analysis to identify the best travel management solution for the Department, which will then aid in the selection of one of three vendors for USDA.

The vendor selection was narrowed to three options by the GSA's eTravel Source Selection Advisory Council. Wendy Snow, USDA's Associate Chief Financial Officer for Financial Systems, led this interdepartmental Advisory Council, which identified the eTravel requirements and guidelines for Federal agencies and selected three vendors to fulfill the decided-upon requirements.

For more information on the eTravel Initiative, please contact the eGovernment Team.

For more information on any of these topics, or for general comments or questions, contact the eGovernment Team at:

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